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ABSTRACT

The Social Circle (Georgia) School System is in the first year of full implementation of mastery learning in reading and mathematics for grades K-5. In response to a state mandate for competency-based education, the board of education adopted a program which included mastery learning and promotion standards. In order to fulfill the goal of informing parents of the program, the following six approaches were planned and implemented: (1) a newsletter from the PTA; (2) newspaper articles and radio spots; (3) original school plays depicting the mastery learning instructional process performed at each grade level; (4) neighborhood teas where parents learned how they could help their children; (5) notices displayed and distributed at local large business plants; and (6) a parent volunteer program. (DC)

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Community Involvement

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The Social Circle, GA School System is in the first year of full implementation of Mastery Learning in Reading and Math in grades K-5. Social Circle is located approximately 35 miles east of Atlanta. We have an independent city system with one thousand students, K-12.

When Competency-Based Education was mandated for schools in Georgia through the establishment of the Criterion-Referenced Testing Program, our superintendent, John T. Burks, believed that Mastery Learning (ML) held promise for his school system. Three years ago he became interested in adopting an Outcome-Based program which focused attention upon equality of achievement, regardless of previous academic achievement and without reference to the socioeconomic backgrounds of learners. He decided to introduce ML into the system beginning at the elementary school level and working upward.

The Social Circle Board of Education agreed with the philosophy of Mastery Learning. However, under the Superintendent's leadership they also requested the establishment of promotion standards as a part of the process. A specified

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set of objectives in reading and math for grades K-5 was formulated last year by the professional staff and the Curriculum Director, Martha Ralls. In August, 1982 the Board of Education formally adopted the Promotion Standards, and this enabled the full implementation of our ML program to become a reality. With this action, the Board formalized our major instructional improvement goals for the school and community: increased achievement in the basic skills of reading and math.

By this time intensive staff development was already being conducted with the staff, and a plan of action for full community involvement was developed. Our goal was to inform parents about the Promotion Standards and the Mastery Learning Process and to give parents suggestions for positive help with their children. We established a specific goal of 75 per cent direct parent contact.

A six phase approach for Community Involvement was planned with input from the Superintendent, Curriculum Director, Principal, and parent volunteers.

1. P.T.A. - An active K-12 P.T.A. organization instituted a newsletter for parents this year based on a need to communicate school goals with parents.

   The Elementary School's ML section deals with specific objectives being taught each month at each grade level; another area focuses on "Mastery Learning Experiences, Challenges, and Celebrations" of the teachers as they teach each objective; and a final section termed "Needed" includes requests of teachers for volunteer help, magazines, books, and other things needed for instruction.

   These newsletters are disseminated monthly to parents.

2. Newspaper and Radio - Articles on ML and the Promotion Standards were written and radio spots aired to discuss them. A parent volunteer has also developed several articles, and continued use of his method of dissemination is planned.

3. School Plays - A goal was established to create and produce a play for each grade level to describe for parents the objectives and the ML instructional process. The children depicted the ML lesson plan format and the objectives in original plays. Plays have now been presented to parents for grades 2 and 3, and 4 and 5.

   Excellent parent response resulted with 75 attending the grade 2 and 3 play (135 students), and 40 parents attending the grade 4 and 5 play (125 students). Grades K and 1 will schedule their creative plays in December.

4. Neighborhood Teas for Achievement - A goal was established to conduct 12 teas in parents' homes and for church/civic groups to discuss the Mastery Learning Program and Promotion Standards. Parents were asked to coordinate the teas, invite neighbors either for morning, afternoon or night sessions for one or two hours. We have currently completed six of these teas with others already scheduled.

   Brochures were prepared to disseminate at the teas. The brochures are color-coded by grade level with an explanation of the ML process with the Reading and Math Promotion Standards for each grade level printed on the back.

At the teas, part of the presentation includes suggestions to parents on specific ways to be supportive of their children's reading and math work including:

1. direct assistance with homework;
2. provide a place and an expected schedule of time(s) to study;
3. conversation with the child concerning learning, reading, math, TV programs, cooperation, self-discipline, good manners, self-control, etc.
4. reassurance to the child of the parent/guardian's love and concern for learning and achieving;
5. model for the child enthusiasm, problem-solving, using math to conduct financial matters and check-book skills, giving service to others, reading newspapers, magazines, books, etc.

The presenters at the teas include the Principal and, on occasion, the Curriculum Director and Superintendent.

Parents have responded with enthusiasm, commitment and excitement, and have followed up on many of the suggestions. They have also increased their attendance at parent-teacher conferences, with several classes having 95 percent of the parents attending. There has even been an increase in the number of fathers who are attending the sessions. Each class is expected to have a minimum of 75 percent direct parent contact for individual conferences with a desired goals of 90 percent overall.

5. Businesses - Notices about our program were included with employee paychecks in three of the five large plants in Social Circle. Posters were also placed above the time-clock in four of the five major plants. Union rules prohibited participation in some instances. Many visits and phone calls resulted from these notices, and community awareness about the school resulted in increased participation at other events.

6. Parent Volunteer Program - We initiated and expanded our parent volunteer program to provide direct instructional help to students needing pre-entry skills for objectives in reading and math, and for correctives. Volunteers from a program initiated last year are continuing to serve as cafeteria hosts and hostesses.

The Curriculum Director, Principal and several volunteers organized and implemented a two-hour training session for volunteers to discuss our expectations, ethics, and specific strategies for assisting children needing instructional correctives. The volunteer program has increased, with both parent and community volunteers becoming involved. They include parents of pre-schoolers, retired teachers, factory workers who come in during the day because they work afternoon and night shifts, etc. One community volunteer even donates his time by trimming all of the school's shrubbery. One of our goals is to have a cadre of grandfathers who will serve as role models for the children by reading and listening to children read to them!